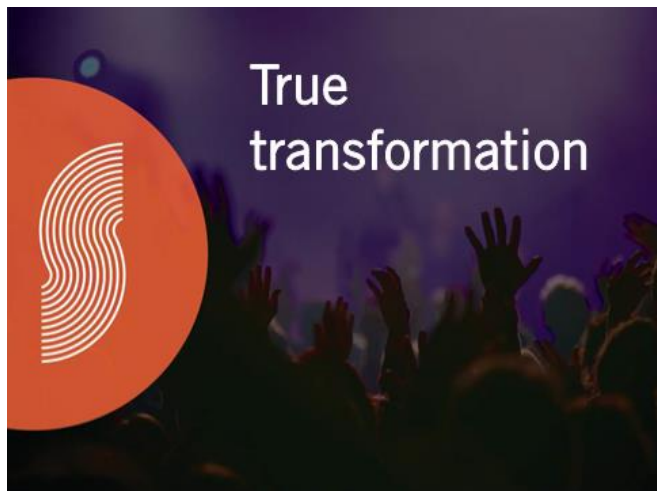


Connect with worship - pray, particularly for the anointing and convicting work of the Holy Spirit. Pray that we would be open to hearing what obstacles to our transformation there might be.

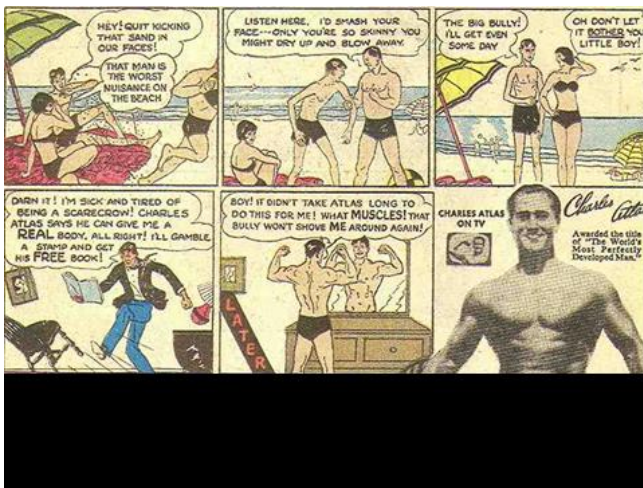


As I speak, listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit in your own heart. Remember what He says to you, and know that He is convicting you of it because He loves you, and wants you to be transformed into the image of Christ.

You and I, along with every Christian, belong to a different Kingdom - the Kingdom of God. Our King is Christ - it is to Him alone that we owe our lives and our allegiance. When we are truly born again, we move from being citizens of the kingdom of the world to being citizens of the Kingdom of God - this by virtue of our adoption as sons and daughters of the King. Our lives need to show evidence of this by being transformed from one that is ruled by the passions and standards of the world, to one that is modelled after the standard set by Jesus Christ. And that is what we are going to talk about this morning - next Sunday we'll get practical - I hope to give us a few simple tools to help us in the process of this transformation then.

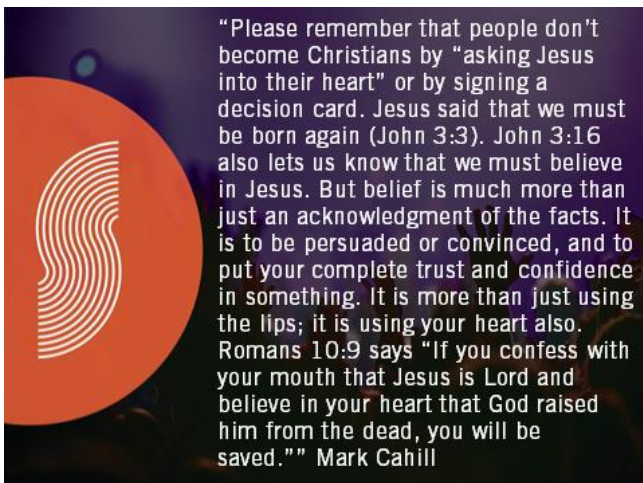
How many of us have ever wanted to be more like someone else? Maybe in looks or wealth or ability? Or in what they own? Or in their fame?

Mmm, me too! I matriculated when I was 17 years old - I was as tall as I ever got, but weighed only 96 pounds (under 44 kilograms). I was always either the tallest or next to tallest in my class, wore spectacles, and could not catch a ball. In the interests of economy, my Dad insisted that I make my own suitcase out of plywood. I suppose that you can imagine what school was like for me... At that time there were advertisements for the Charles Atlas bodybuilding system.



As you can see, the advertisements made all kinds of promises about a physical transformation - you can probably imagine! So that's an example of how we sometimes want to be transformed, but with a transformation that is very much less than God's best for us.

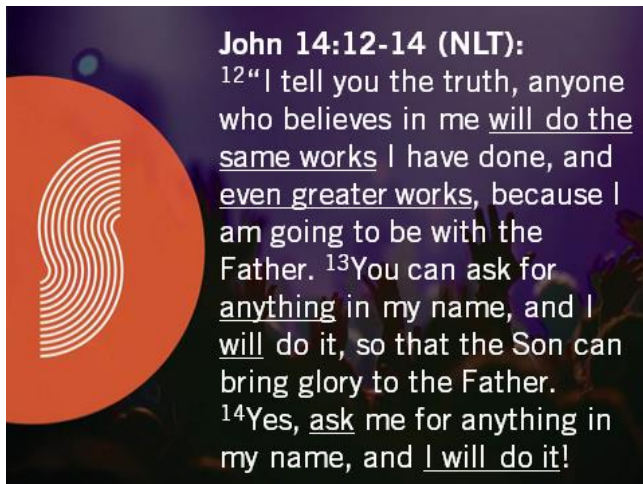
This is a quote by Mark Cahill:



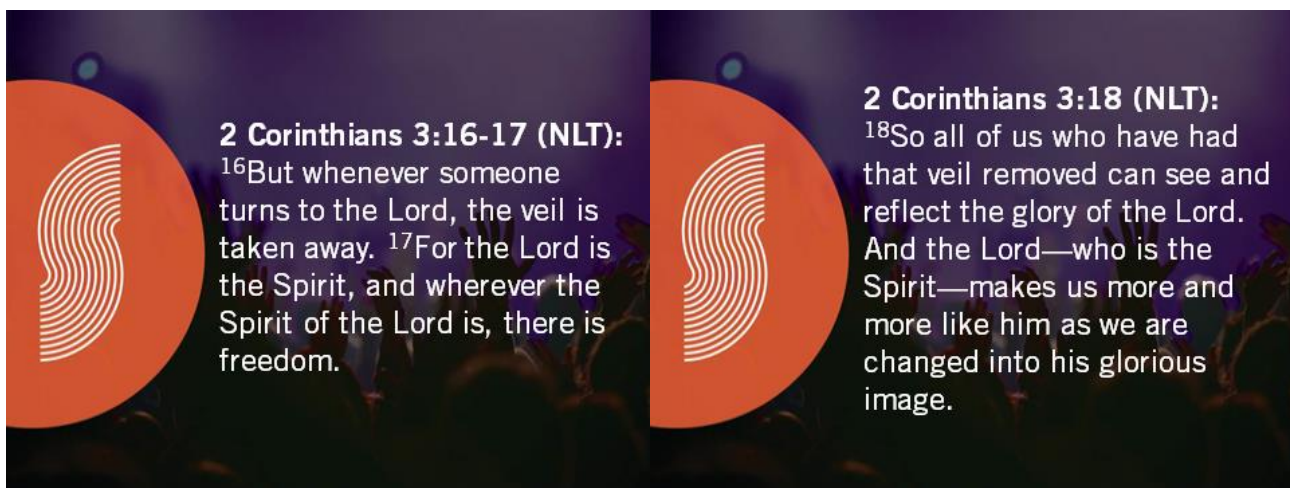
There is a whole lot in this statement - I particularly like what he says about belief. Also, being born again surely speaks of an entirely new beginning. Do you remember Ester last Sunday speaking of the metamorphosis (or transformation) of a caterpillar into a butterfly? The caterpillar and the butterfly are made of exactly the same material - it is just reconfigured (or transformed from a caterpillar into a butterfly). That so clearly demonstrates to me what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus when He tells him that we need to be born again. We are the same person, but are being formed by the Lord into our proper form - as He saw us and purposed for us from the very beginning.

How does a caterpillar get to be a butterfly? It eats and eats on the correct food for it, then it rests and lets the Lord change it. Simple, isn't it? And is it not the same for us? Let's look at how we do this...

When we become a Christian, a healthy attitude is to want to become Christlike - He, after all, set the standard for human life; so Who better to want to be like? Especially when He said that we would do the things that He did, and even greater works.



Remember that His motivation was always to bring glory to His Father. So how are we transformed from being the kind of people that we are, to being Christlike? Part of our answer lies in Jesus' words right here in this Scripture: verse 14 - we simply ask, and He will come through for us. However, as Rick Warren said: "Persistence purifies my prayers. If I won't pray about it more than once, it's just a whim, not a real request." We need to understand that transformation is a process that we really want, and that prayer is a part of that process - praying once and leaving it there won't cut it. There are, however, more parts to the process than prayer.



Here we see that it is as we submit to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives that we are transformed to be like Christ. The Holy Spirit removes the veil that blinds us - then a process makes us more and more like Him.

But how? Let me read the first part of Romans 12 to us in two translations:




Romans 12:1 (NLT):

¹And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice - the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.



Romans 12:2 (NLT):

² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.



Romans 12:2 (ESV):

²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

So we see firstly that we need to *GIVE* our bodies to the Lord - this means that we allow Him to set the standard for what we do with them - actively surrendering our own lusts and desires to Him, and submitting to what He wants for us. Secondly, we see that we need to renew our minds, or change the way that we think **SO THAT** we can know the Lord's will. How do we do that? Renew our minds - how does our mind become renewed?

David, as we know from Acts 13:22 (quoting from 1 Samuel 13:14) was a man after God's own heart. I'll read it for you:

Acts 13:22 (NLT)

²² But God removed Saul and replaced him with David, a man about whom God said, 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart. He will do everything I want him to do.'

Now let's read Psalm 26, which is a Psalm of this David:

Psalm 26:1-3 (NLT):

¹Declare me innocent, O LORD, for I have acted with integrity; I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. ²Put me on trial, LORD, and cross-examine me. Test my motives and my heart. ³For I am always aware of your unfailing love, and I have lived according to your truth.

Psalm 26:4-7 (NLT):

⁴I do not spend time with liars or go along with hypocrites. ⁵I hate the gatherings of those who do evil, and I refuse to join in with the wicked. ⁶I wash my hands to declare my innocence. I come to your altar, O LORD, ⁷singing a song of thanksgiving and telling of all your wonders.

Psalm 26:8-11 (NLT):

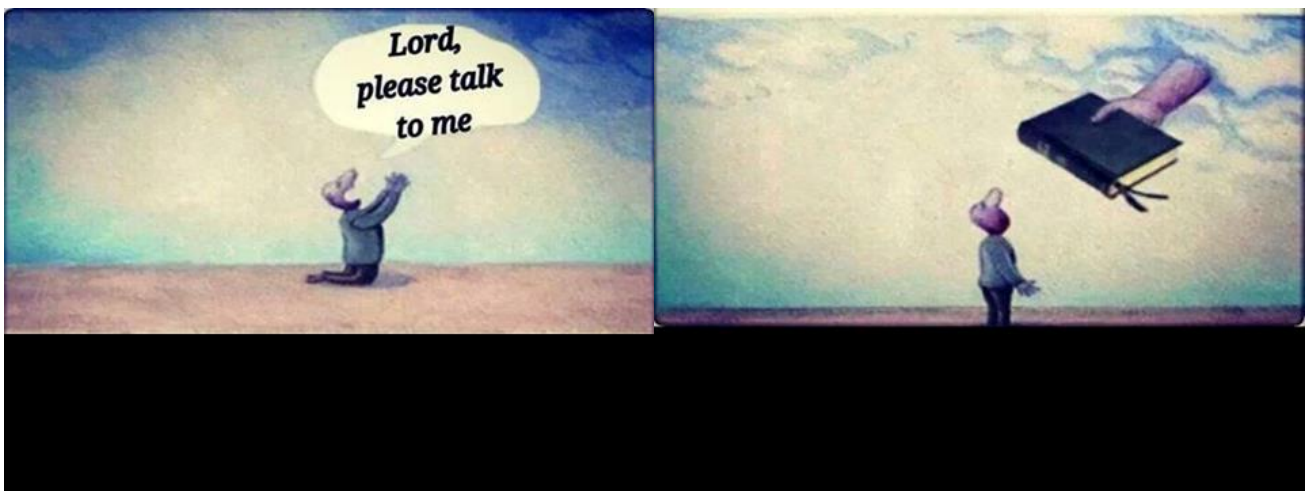
⁸I love your sanctuary, LORD, the place where your glorious presence dwells. ⁹Don't let me suffer the fate of sinners. Don't condemn me along with murderers. ¹⁰Their hands are dirty with evil schemes, and they constantly take bribes. ¹¹But I am not like that; I live with integrity. So redeem me and show me mercy.

Psalm 26:12 (NLT):

¹²Now I stand on solid ground, and I will publicly praise the LORD.

Here we see another aspect of becoming Christlike - we choose the company that we keep. We avoid the company of those who do evil, and keep company with other Christians. Note that this does not mean that we exclude ourselves from the world, it means that choose to be salt and light rather than be shaped by the world's way of thinking and doing. We choose to spend time with like-minded Christians in worship to the Lord.

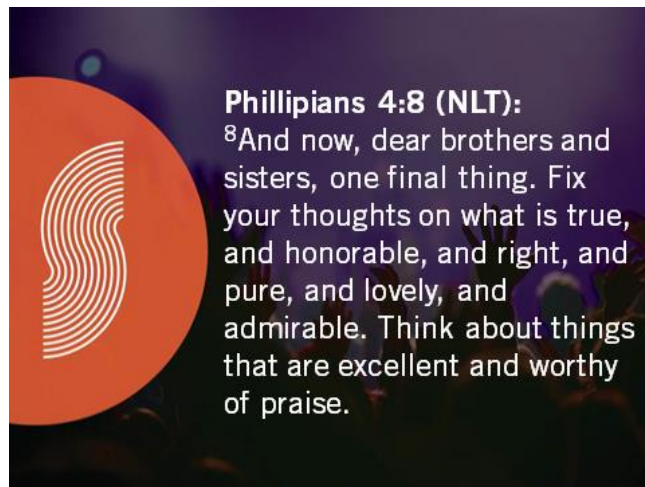
The next leg to renewing our minds is to fill them with truth - you all know what comes next "Eat the Word!" Look at this cartoon:



There is a LOT of truth in that... How often have we said that we want the Lord to speak to us, but we neglect reading the Scriptures? Scripture gives us practical guidelines for Christian living. How do we test anything for truth? Against the

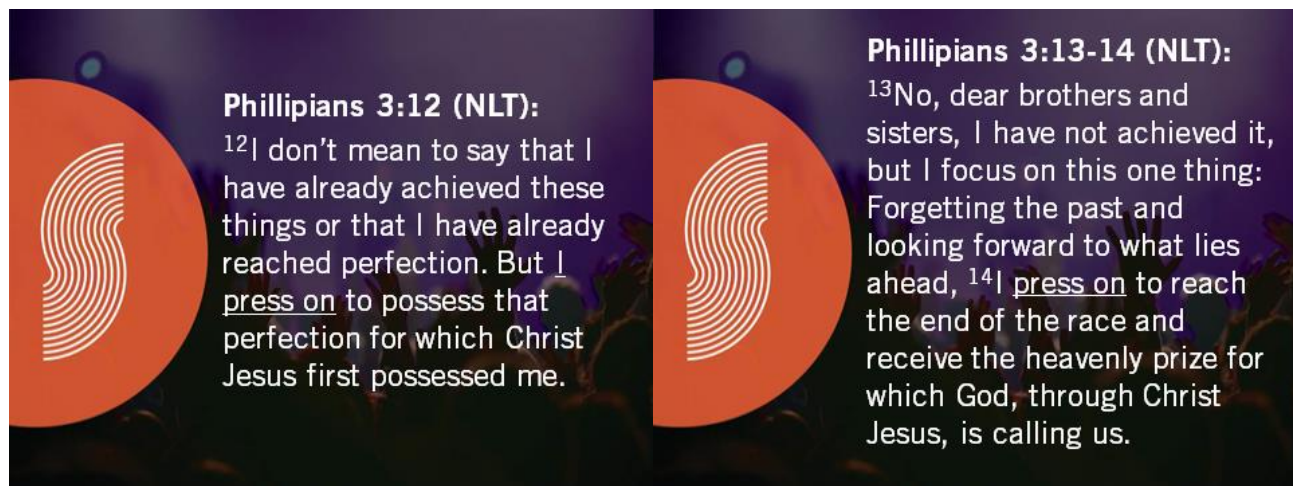
standard of Scripture. How will we know that something is not true if we do not know what the truth is?

To continue this thought, let's see what Paul says to the Philippians:




Think on these things. We have probably all heard it said that “we are what we eat”. Is it not even more true to say that we are what we think or meditate upon? What we read and listen to play an extremely influential role in the way that we live. Would it not then be true to say that we should think on the Scriptural truth? That only this will cause us to be formed into the image of Christ?

Now, we need to understand that our transformation is a process, and that we need to persevere in it. See what Paul has to say to the Philippians about this:




So Paul presses on to the goal of being transformed to perfection in Christ - should we do any less? We have to understand that our transformation is a process that we need to work at.

We are required to show that we are in the process of transformation:



Phillipians 2:12b-13 (NLT):

^{12b}Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. ¹³For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.




Phillipians 2:14-15 (NLT):

¹⁴Do everything without complaining and arguing, ¹⁵so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.


I am so blessed by verse 13 - God is working in you, *GIVING* you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him. So He doesn't just impose an impossible goal onto us - He equips us to meet His challenge too! Wonderful, wonderful grace! In this way we can fulfil the requirements of verses 14 and 15.

Now, we need to understand that our transformation is resisted by the enemy - he hates it when people become Christian and start to be transformed - nothing shows him and his works with humanity up more than a transformed Christ-like Christian. So we need to know how to recognise and resist the enemy's resistance to our transformation. Let's look at 2 Corinthians:



2 Corinthians 10:3-4 (ESV):

³For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.



2 Corinthians 10:5-6 (ESV):

⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

We take our thoughts captive - in other words, we do not allow our thoughts to rule us. We examine each and every thought, check its source, and then decide to either accept or reject it. This is a vital part of renewing our minds as we are transformed! Every thought, whatever its source (the enemy or our own fallen nature) that is contrary to the Lord's will for us, needs to be recognised and rejected before it can do its evil work of resisting our transformation to Christlikeness.

Why do the Scriptures talk about living in the newness of life? Surely this means that we are not only *MADE* new, but that we need to be transformed closer and closer to Christ's example of how to live. Surely as we do this, our lives will be the most compelling witness to the broken people of the world - we will live as people who have hope, and who live victoriously. Sin will no longer rule our lives - we will rule with Christ.

Now for encouragement, let's look at two Scriptures that talk about how Christ has blazed the trail for us:

Romans 6:1-3 (NLT):

¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Romans 6:4-5 (NLT):

⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Romans 6:6-8 (NLT):

⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

When someone dies naturally, can they continue to sin? Of course not, they're dead! If we BELIEVE (exercise faith) in what Jesus has done for us, then we will more readily choose to be transformed to be like Him - see verse 11 now...

Romans 6:9-11 (NLT):

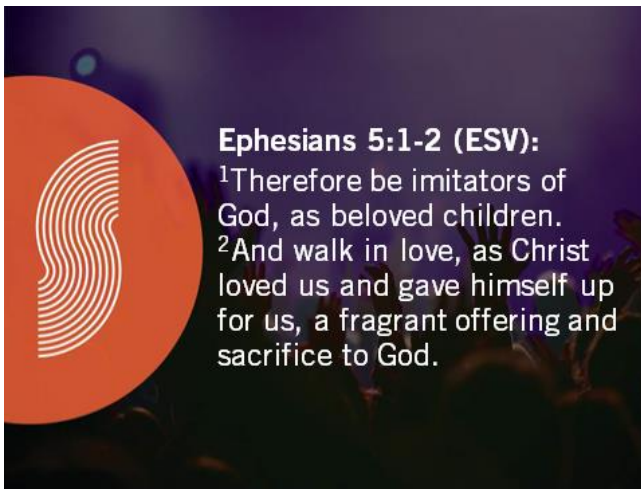
⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:12-13 (NLT):

¹²Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

See how we are encouraged to choose to present ourselves to God? For Him to do His transforming work in us?

How do we do this?



We become imitators of God. Remember that Jesus said to His disciples that because they had seen Him, they had seen the Father - that is why we are to follow His example. Paul also famously said to the Corinthians and Philipians that they should imitate him as he imitated Christ.

To summarise then:



I plan to send a list of questions that you can discuss during your cell group meetings this week - I hope that they will prove to be useful in stimulating thought on the topic of transformation.

Pray:

- If we do not want to be transformed, please convict us of our need for it
 - Help us to submit to the process of transformation
 - Give us a hunger for the Scriptures
 - Help us to discern the people with whom we spend time - so that we influence those around us for the Kingdom of God, rather than be drawn away by their influence.
-

Do you and I want to be transformed?

If we do, why?

- Is it because we are not satisfied with our lives?
- Or is it because we want to please the Lord?

If we don't, why?

- Is it because we fear the process?
- Or is it because we fear what the Lord might ask us to change about our lives?

If we do want to be transformed, into what do we want to be transformed?

- A better version of ourselves?
- To be like someone that we admire?
- Or closer to the image of Christ?

If we do want to be transformed, what prevents us from being transformed?

- Is it a lack of the will to do so?
- Or a lack of knowledge on how to do so?
- Is it because we resist the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?
- Is it because we resist the commands and principles of Scripture?

What should make a Christian different from the "world"?

- Should it not be our Christlikeness?
 - That manifests in love?
 - For our brothers and sisters, but also for the world's lost people?
-